

THE SHORT COURSE SERIES

THE LENTEN PSALMS

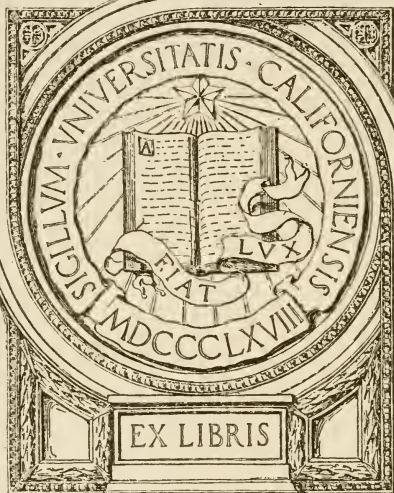
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THE SHORT COURSE SERIES

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THE LENTEN PSALMS

## GENERAL PREFACE

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THE title of the present series is a sufficient indication of its purpose. Few preachers, or congregations, will face the long courses of expository lectures which characterised the preaching of the past, but there is a growing conviction on the part of some that an occasional short course, of six or eight connected studies on one definite theme, is a necessity of their mental and ministerial life. It is at this point the projected series would strike in. It would suggest to those who are mapping out a scheme of work for the future a variety of subjects which might possibly be utilised in this way.

The appeal, however, will not be restricted to ministers or preachers. The various volumes will meet the needs of laymen and

## General Preface

Sunday School teachers who are interested in a scholarly but also practical exposition of Bible history and doctrine. In the hands of office-bearers and mission-workers the "Short Course Series" may easily become one of the most convenient and valuable of Bible helps.

It need scarcely be added that while an effort has been made to secure, as far as possible, a general uniformity in the scope and character of the series, the final responsibility for the special interpretations and opinions introduced into the separate volumes, rests entirely with the individual contributors.

A detailed list of the authors and their subjects will be found at the close of each volume.





The Short Course Series

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THE  
LENTEN PSALMS

BY

THE EDITOR

THE  
LENTEN PSALMS

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SINCE the time of Origen, Seven Psalms have received the name of Penitential Psalms. They were placed together in the Roman Breviary ; and Pope Innocent III. ordered their recitation at Lent. Indulgences were promised to those who recited them. One historical allusion may be cited. "In his sick chamber at Hippo, Augustine lay dying. It was a plain and barely furnished room in which he lay. The Penitential Psalms, however, were by his order written out, and placed where he could see them from his bed. These he looked at and read in his days of sickness, weeping often and sore. Thus, with his eyes fixed upon the Psalms, Augustine passed to his rest, August 28th, 430."—PROTHERO.

PSALM VI.

A

I



## THE CHASTISEMENT OF LOVE.

No more fitting plaint could be put into the lips of any pious sufferer than this pathetic strain from the harp of Israel—especially when sung to one of the minor tunes of our time-honoured Scottish Psalter. “Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.” Nay, adds Matthew Henry, “let him sing this psalm”—

“Lord, in Thy wrath rebuke me not;  
Nor in Thy hot rage chasten me.  
Lord, pity me, for I am weak:  
Heal me, for my bones vexed be.”

Calvin, in his last painful illness, tried to do so. He uttered no word of complaint unworthy of a Christian man, but, raising his eyes to heaven, he would say, in the language of verse 3, “O Lord, how long—?” leaving his unfinished prayer in the sudden silence of this arresting aposiopesis. The

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deepest notes in human experience are minor notes. Down in the human heart are chords of music, truer, richer, and more spontaneous than all the major and popular melodies by which a modern civilisation has tried to cheat us. They are like the minor tones in external Nature—

“Loud from its rocky caverns, the deep-voiced neighbouring ocean  
Speaks, and, in accents disconsolate, answers the wail of the forest.”

The wail of the forest, the disconsolate accents of ocean, the monotonous chant of the waterfall, the bleating of flocks among the hills, and the weird-like call of the moor-fowl among the heather—all these seem to be pervaded with a suggestion of autumn's sadness; and we are made to feel that the nearer we get back to Nature the more appropriate become the minor tunes and plaintive melodies of these penitential psalms. The elegy, the wail, the dirge, are not the lowest form of musical composition; and as the Hebrew Psalter is a faithful transcript of the human heart in all its



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moods, pious sufferers have continued to come to this song-book of ancient Israel, and have drawn from its strains of penitence and devotion a comfort which is Divine. In the present psalm there are three key-words which may help to elucidate its teaching.

## I. CHASTISEMENT.

“Neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure.”

The Psalmist is face to face with the truth which has played so large a part in the discipline of the world, that “whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.” He does not rail against chastisement as such. He knows that Jehovah chastens, sometimes in love, and smites that He may save. Every true child of the Kingdom, therefore, may well kiss the rod that smites him; for while no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised

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thereby. Still there is chastening *and* chastening. The Psalmist did not believe that all Divine punishment or reproof was intended for reformation. There might be visitations of God in just anger—visitations which could only be regarded as tokens of the Divine alienation and wrath. And while the devout sufferer was quite willing to submit to the former—to the chastisement of love—he does shrink appalled from the severity of the latter, and exclaims, like Jeremiah, “O Lord, correct me, but with judgment: not in Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing”: or with Christina Rossetti—

“Wilt Thou accept the heart I bring,  
O gracious Lord and kind,  
To ease it of a torturing sting,  
And staunch and bind?”

Or if Thou wilt not yet relieve,  
*Be not extreme to sift:*  
Accept a faltering will to give,  
Itself Thy gift.”

The resignation and shrinking contained

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in a cry like this forecast the awe-inspiring alternatives of Gethsemane. "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me : nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." If a Father's hand wield the rod, I will try to kiss the rod that smites me ; but, O Lord, chasten me not in Thy hot displeasure, for I could not endure the severity of the blow.

And then, as if to suggest the reflection that the chastisement had been carried too far already, he spreads out his wretchedness in the sight of God's great pity, and paints it in all the sad colouring of the autumn. "*I am withered away*"—as a flower. The scorching winds of adversity have blown across my garden ; the biting frosts of hostility have nipped my foliage in the bud ; or like a fragile flower bereft of the rain and sunshine, I trail my faded blossoms in the dust. Yea, "my bones are vexed." By a slight variation in the figure, he points to the influence of his calamity upon the physical framework of the body. His very bones which are the strength and stability

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of the bodily frame are shaken or agitated with terror as the result of his inward perplexity. And "my soul also is sore vexed." In soul, no less than in body, I am like a bruised reed: and instead of there being any alleviation of my suffering the leaden hoofs of adversity would trample me still further into the mud. Until at last, with something like reproach in his voice, he lifts his eyes to the infinite Personality which seemed so callous to his suffering, and exclaims, "And Thou, O Lord, how long—?" Is this an action worthy of Thee, O Lord, to allow a poor, bruised reed to be broken utterly, or the dying, smouldering flax to be utterly quenched? Is this an attitude in keeping with Thy manifold mercy, or a discipline at all in harmony with the gracious chastisement of Thy love? "O Jehovah, how long—?" And then his heart fails him for words, the unfinished petition being left in the eloquence of its incompleteness. He has spread out his state of misery in the presence of Divine compassion, and then with this

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abrupt, half-broken cry, "How long," he leaves it with God.

This is what all devout souls may aspire to do. Deeply conscious of the chastening hand of their God upon them, they may creep up to the Divine footstool and raise their eyes to heaven, like wounded animals crawling up to the feet of their master and looking up into his face with great eyes of pain. Their suffering is a deep they may never hope to fathom, but they can bring it into the presence of Him who is both justice and love, and believe that in the plenitude of His mercy He will not only bring forth their righteousness as the light, but cause the flower which was trailing its blossoms in the dust to unfold once more its petals in the sunshine. This is the deeper meaning of the Divine chastisement of love: it is big with the promise of what may yet be.

## 2. LOVINGKINDNESS.

"O save me for Thy lovingkindness' sake."

This is the Psalmist's perfect plea when thinking on the possible mitigation

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of his pain. He falls back with confidence on Jehovah's covenant love. For the love of God in choosing and blessing Israel is the theme and joy of all the sacred writers. He delights in mercy. He is ready to forgive. He keeps not His anger for ever. Let Him be true, then, to His own nature ! Let His self-revelation in act be consistent with the inner graciousness of His motive ! For, to give another turn to the Psalmist's thought, would not the Divine loving-kindness be deprived of a part of its legitimate praise if the present prayer of the singer should be left unanswered ? His physical vigour, as already noted, was drooping and fading away like a flower. It was being impaired by the severity of his afflictions ; and unless it could be delivered from the secret causes of its decay, what hope was there that it would be continued in the land of the living at all ? It would die, and be given over to the gloomy abode of the dead ; and then the days of praising God's mercy would once and for all be ended.

## The Chastisement of Love

“For in death there is no remembrance of Thee :  
In Sheol who shall give Thee thanks?”

It is clearly implied in this plea, that the Psalmist believed that Jehovah cared for men's praise. And why not? God is love—compassionate and eternal love ; and praise on the part of man is simply the proof that this love of God has been responded to. Joy in men's praise, therefore, is but joy in men's love, and joy in men's love is but the recognition that God's love for them has not been manifested in vain. Hence the Psalmist prays for freedom from trial, not as an end in itself, but as a means to a further end—the end of celebrating the mercy of Jehovah in the land of the living. He longs to escape as a bird from the darkened cage of adversity, that he may rise and sing in the sunshine of the Divine favour. Freedom from affliction is not everything : it is freedom that we may *praise*—freedom that we may come, as in another psalm, and say :—

“I'll bring burnt-offerings to Thy house,  
To Thee my vows I'll pay,  
Which my lips uttered, my mouth spake,  
When trouble on me lay.”

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Alas, the feeling of dejection depicted in verses 6 and 7 is sufficient evidence that this earnest cry for freedom has not as yet been answered. The sense of his own misery again wins the mastery. And instead of soaring aloft as the eagle, the strong wings of his hope seem to be struck with paralysis, and it flutters down into the valley below, where, overpowered by the consciousness of its own hapless condition, it has no reassuring thought of the Divine nearness at all. In these two verses the name of God is not even mentioned, and the manifestations of his sorrow are so excessive that we find it difficult with our undemonstrative Western temperaments to give him credit for the anguish conveyed in his words. Not only did he set his bed afloat with his unmeasured weeping, but he melted his couch and wasted away his eyes until they became "bleared and dim like those of an old man." And all this because of his enemies—all this because of those, who, taking advantage of God's chastening hand upon him, were exulting in his calamity, and longing for



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his utter ruin. It is a dark picture ; but it proves to be the darkness which precedes the dawn. With this sombre reflection, he gathers up all that can be said of his grievous and bitter trial, and prepares the way for the sudden burst of sunshine with which this penitential psalm concludes.

### 3. DELIVERANCE.

“The Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping.”

*Lux in tenebris* is the one descriptive phrase that can really do justice to the change effected in this man's experience. Immediately, like a flash of light, the conviction has come to him that the eloquence of his tears has been heard in heaven. A great confidence, begotten by the Spirit of God, has visited his soul, and he knows as by the certainty of a Divine inspiration that his time of bitter weeping is at an end. He uses the perfect tense—what the Hebrew grammarians call the “perfect of certitude” ; for while his bodily disease is not yet lifted, and while the dark prison walls of hostility

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are not yet removed, a whisper from the eternities has visited this man's spirit, and he knows that the hour of his Divine deliverance has already struck. None of his detractors are aware of the swift advance of the dawn, but the voice of the dawn is already in his heart, and he can gaze at the hilltops now being flushed with the coming glory, and say, "The Lord *hath heard* the voice of my weeping."

This song of penitence, therefore, like all sanctified affliction, has ended in the assurance of God's covenant love. It began differently. Like a mountain stream it was turbid and broken at the first, but gradually it has calmed and cleared as it flowed, until now, at the close, it loses the voice of its weeping in the assurance of the Divine compassion, just as the flowing streamlet is stilled in the fulness of the sea. It began with the chastisement of love, and ends with the drying of every tear; and in view of these facts, enemies can do nothing. He that is for us is infinitely more than they who may be against us. Therefore—

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“Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity;  
For Jehovah hath heard my prayer.”

Ye workers of iniquity ! Is it right for us to speak of our detractors in that way ? and especially to add, as in verse 10, “Let them all be ashamed and sore vexed : let them return and be ashamed suddenly ” (A.V.). Even to modify this grim desire by taking the verbs as simple futures, and rendering with the R.V. :—“All mine enemies shall be ashamed and sore vexed,” is, in no sense, a sentiment in keeping with the spirit of redeeming love. From this point of view, Professor Duhm is probably correct when he says that “for reading at a Christian sick-bed, this psalm is not suitable.” In the school of Jesus we are taught to give our enemies a place even in our prayers. “Pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.” Hence if any one would use the phraseology of this psalm to-day, it must be in a very different sense from that of the Psalmist. “Let them be ashamed and sore vexed”—not in the sense of destruction, but of moral reformation.

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“Let them return, and be ashamed suddenly,” as their blinded eyes are opened to the patience and tenderness of the Divine love ; until bowing in submission to Him who is the Anointed of the Father, they may pass at last with us, from the minor melodies of these penitential psalms to the higher symphonies of heaven. That is the world-wide charity as taught in the Christian Evangel. The Lord give us grace thus to dry our tears !

PSALM XXXII.



## THE BITTERNESS OF SIN.

SIN is the one element in human experience that refuses to be ignored. Through superficial views of its nature or sheer indifference to the fact, we may come to *say*, like some in the Apostolic age, that we have no sin (1 John i. 8); but we gain nothing by this assertion of our ignorance or apathy. The well-known device of the ostrich does not save it from the weapon of the hunter, and the mere shutting of one's eyes to the reality of evil does not make it vanish, but delivers us all the more surely into its power. Sin, according to Seneca, is the "universal insanity." It is a dark and dismal nightshade casting a gloom over every department of human life. Grace may change the nature of a man, but nothing can change the nature

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of sin. Enemies may be reconciled, but enmity cannot, and sin is enmity.

Some of the details in Ps. xxxii. 5, as given in the Hebrew, are most suggestive—

*My sin* I began to make known, and mine iniquity  
have I not hid :

I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord ;  
And Thou—Thou forgavest the iniquity of *my sin*.  
[Selah.]

Like the entire psalm, it enumerates the steps by which the Psalmist rose into the blessedness of the forgiven state ; and we may profitably analyse its teaching a little more in detail.

### I. THE NATURE OF SIN.

The expression “sin” is the first word in this Hebrew verse, and also the last, the musical addition “Selah” not being regarded as an integral part of the verse. It is placed in this position for the sake of emphasis ; for, unlike Ps. vi., which never mentions the subject of sin at all, Ps. xxxii. introduces this topic as its leading and



## The Bitterness of Sin

characteristic note. So strongly did some of the Masoretes feel this that they pointed the first word with an emphatic accent. They wished to represent to eye and ear what was already felt to be present in reality, that sin was the dominant idea in this psalm, and that both melody and syntax might justly be requisitioned to emphasise the truth.

And is this not the teaching of etymology? In this one verse no fewer than three Hebrew words are employed to designate moral evil. And while etymologically they are all figurative terms, transferred from the physical sphere to the ethical, they furnish in their combination a fairly exhaustive summary of the Bible doctrine of sin. Probably the most distinctive epithet is the term "transgression" or *rebellion*—a conception which traces sin to its fruitful source in the will of the individual. It is not simply the thought of lawlessness, in the sense of defection from a prescribed law; it is rather a voluntary act of self-assertion in opposition to the will of a superior. It is withdrawal from, or

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rebellion against, the Lawgiver (cf. Ps. li. 4). Beginning with this as its starting-point, the subsequent development of moral evil is not difficult to trace. It is *iniquity*. It is a course crooked and perverse ; and, therefore, well chosen to denote the tortuous path of the rebel, who, instead of following the straight route for the attainment of man's chief end, wanders zigzag over the desert and never reaches his destined goal. This is the precise thought introduced by the third term, *sin*. It means that the slinger has failed to hit the mark, or the traveller to reach his destination ; for, having begun wrong, he cannot end right, and the forsaker is himself forsaken. Obviously the man who could multiply these terms in order to depict his moral malady had no superficial views regarding its nature and influence. The disturbing presence of moral evil had invaded the sphere of the *conscience*.

Verses 3, 4, show how cutting a lash the conscience may become in driving home the truth of personal guilt. Everything seemed to go wrong. The heart was ill at

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ease. The concealment of the sin was well-nigh unbearable. The conscience was filled with a thousand thorns to prick and sting him. And as conscience is the voice of God, it never ceased to arraign him day and night before God's judgment bar. This was one of the ways in which the enormity of his sin had come home to roost. Conscience is the worm that never dies.

### 2. THE CONFESSION OF SIN.

In verses 3, 4, as already noted, the Psalmist was forced to admit that if he foolishly kept silence regarding his sin, he was constrained to cry out because of his misery—

“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old  
Through my roaring all the day long.”

The cry of misery, however, is not always the birth-throes of a deep and genuine confession. Many a sufferer cries out in anguish who has no intention of recognising the hand that smites him, or of admitting the essential justice of the visitation. Con-

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fession of sin is rendered possible only when the afflicted one is made to feel the depth of his demerit, and begins to acknowledge to himself or others the grievous character of his backsliding. And this is the exact meaning of the incipient imperfect which is here employed by the Psalmist—"My sin *I began to make known*"—the tense of the verb graphically representing the nascent confession in the very act of beginning. It had not as yet assumed the form of a direct appeal to Jehovah ; for probably we ought to omit "unto Thee" with the Septuagint. The man had only reached the initial stage of his confession, as he tried to make plain to his own heart and conscience the peculiar heinousness of his sin. But the second stage speedily followed. The more he realised the presence of the foul intruder which had usurped his inmost being, the more he determined to drag it forth into the open, and expose it to the searching glance of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil. "I said, I *will confess* my transgressions unto the Lord"—until now,

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as the gracious result, he bows in the felt presence of Jehovah, a guileless and transparent life : “ Mine iniquity *have I not hid.*” This is the true nature of confession. It includes the heart, the speech, and the life. It begins with a secret resolution in the soul, which, by and by, finds expression in a direct appeal to Jehovah ; but the consequences of the completed action are continued into the present, and the Psalmist can speak of the blessedness of the man “ in whose spirit there is *no guile* ” (ver. 2).

Absolute sincerity, in other language, is the mark of all true confession. There must be no attempt to deceive either oneself or God. “ If we say that we have no sin ” we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins— if we come as the blind man came, and stand in the presence of the great Healer, like the prepared plate in the camera ready to receive the impress of heaven’s light, the blessing of forgiveness is not withheld —“ He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all un-

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righteousness." Such penitents are sincere. They have no fold in their character. They are fervent and transparent in their prayer. Their singleness of aim is reflected in the urgency of their supplication. "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

### 3. THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN.

"And Thou—Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

The student will note the aoristic use of the perfect and the emphasis impressed on the pronoun "Thou." They combine to enforce the truth that Jehovah was more willing to forgive the returning penitent than the man himself was to come and solicit the blessing. The Psalmist was reviewing the various steps in his confession—how behind the transparent attitude of his present was lying the verbal appeal which he had addressed to Jehovah, and behind the actual presentation of his prayer the initial resolution of the heart ; and *there* at the beginning of it all, like heart answering heart in an inner sanctuary, the Divine response was

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granted to the silent appeal, and the penitent entered into the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. As in the teaching of the Pearl of Parables, the father had not waited for the verbal confession of the prodigal son. He beheld the lonely figure a great way off; and before a single word had fallen from his lips, the tears of an undying affection were falling upon his neck. "I said, *I will confess* . . . and Thou—Thou *forgavest* the iniquity of my sin."

The nature of the forgiveness is fully set forth in verses 1, 2. If no fewer than three Hebrew terms were required to describe the sin, no fewer than three similar figures are necessary to depict the remedy. It is at once the lifting of a burden, the covering of a foul stain, and the cancelling of a debt. The burden is removed, as in Bunyan's immortal allegory; the stain is hidden out of sight, as by the love that covereth a multitude of sins; and the debt having been wiped out by the exercise of sovereign mercy, is no longer reckoned against the

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offender as a dreaded liability to punishment. And as all this is described, at least in verse 1, by the use of the Hebrew participle, we have a form of expression which is eloquent with meaning as to the origin and continuity of the forgiven state. The passive participle describes the subject as having the action continually exercised upon him. Blessed, then, is the man who abides in this state of forgiveness ; for both in origin and result the two lines of development approach and coincide. What began as aorists in the completed acts of the past ("I said" . . . "thou forgavest") is continued as present perfects or passive participles into the spiritual conditions of the present ; and the continuity of the one is reflected in the continuity of the other, like the blue of sea and sky in their unity.

### 4. THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE FORGIVEN STATE.

Not even the *sound* of the raging flood shall be allowed to invade its sanctity. This,



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according to the brilliant emendation of Lagarde, is the meaning of verse 6—

“For this let everyone that is godly pray unto Thee in  
the time of distress ;

The sound of the flood of mighty waters shall not  
come nigh unto him.”

We think of one like Jeremiah fleeing from the men of Anathoth in chap. xii. 1-5. Casting himself down in some remote spot overlooking the valley of the Jordan, he brooded, like Elijah under the juniper tree, on the violence by which he had been assailed, and questioned the ways and acts of Eternal Providence. But hark ! wafted on the night wind came the noise of a foaming flood. The “swelling of Jordan,” as in the floods of autumn, was sweeping in furious volume to the sea. And the far-off boom was enough to strike even a strong man with dismay. For was it not suggestive of something far more ominous and forbidding ? What if that distant sound should give place to the dreaded reality ? and the prophet, one day, had to pass through the dark flood itself ? “If thou hast run with the

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footmen and they have wearied thee, then how wilt thou contend with the horsemen? And if thou hast faltered and trembled even at the fords in summer, what wilt thou do in the autumn spates?"

It is only the man who is strong in the assurance of covenant mercy, who can give the answer of this psalm, that even the *sound* of the flood of mighty waters shall not come nigh unto him. Like the Accadian penitent he has said, "In the waters of the raging flood take his hand"; and now in the rapture of a Divine forgiveness, there is no sound to him save one—he is compassed about with "songs of deliverance" (ver. 7). No need for him to stop his ears with wax, like the Grecian sailors, that the siren voices of evil or the sound of the raging flood should not come nigh him! A Divine Orpheus is on board dispensing music in the night, and every other strain is drowned and lost in the rapture of that triumph song.

Nay, the man's fellowship with the Divine is something deeper still, and the finest of Bible imagery may well be chosen to express

## The Bitterness of Sin

it. Not simply the reflection of sea and sky, however beautiful they are in their unity ; and assuredly not the relation of a man to his beast, as so graphically depicted in verse 9 ; but that deeper and more spiritual communion of a father and son, as eye meets eye, and soul looks into soul, in an act of age-long, covenant love.

“ I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which  
thou shalt go,  
*I will fix upon thee Mine eye.*”

Obviously, one may rightly speak of the blessedness of the forgiven state. It is free from alarms by night, encircled with song by day, and characterised by deep, spiritual communion while life lasts—in a word, compassed about by Divine *mercy*, as in verse 10 ; who would not seek to rise into the fulness of so rich an experience, and lose the bitterness, if not the consciousness, of sin, in the glad ascription of praise with which this penitential psalm concludes—

“ Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous :  
And shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.”

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In conventional phrases, it may be, but with a deep, spiritual fervour that redeems and beautifies the whole, the songs that thrilled the Psalmist's heart are now to be caught up and chanted by the entire Church. For in this grand "Hallelujah Chorus" of exultant adoration and praise, the penitence of the pious in Israel is to be glorified.

PSALM XXXVIII.



## THE DIVINE ARROWS.

“For Thine arrows stick fast in me,  
And Thy hand presseth me sore” (ver. 2).

THE verbs employed in this verse are two different forms of the same Hebrew root, meaning *to descend* ; cf. the rendering “lighted on” in the margin of the R.V. In no sense, however, does this do justice to the reflexive force of the original. The arrows do more than descend. They hurl themselves down with such force that they stick fast in the quivering flesh like living things endowed with volition. And the animation of the second clause is no less striking in its imagery. Instead of taking the term “hand” as the subject of the verb, the Septuagint reads it as the object, and lifts the thought from the dire weight of the chastisement to

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the personal agency of Him who inflicted it—

“*Thou* hast laid Thine hand upon me.”

The one who had bent his bow, and shot his arrows from afar, was not content to remain at a distance. He had drawn near to his afflicted servant, and laid an oppressive hand upon his life. The poisoned arrows rankled in the wounds, and the pressure of the Divine hand was heavier than he could bear : and thus in words almost identical with the first penitential psalm, he exclaims—

“O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy wrath,  
Neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure.”

The subject-matter of the entire psalm may be arranged as follows :—

### I. THE DIVINE ARROWS.

Beginning with the element of disease in his own person (vers. 3, 5–8, 10), he passes to that of desertion on the part of his friends (ver. 11), and of malice (ver. 12) or even scorn (ver. 16) on the part of his foes : and



## The Divine Arrows

the reader is left to infer that these were the arrows that fell thick and fast around the Psalmist, and buried their poison-dipped barbs in his life. We may scan the realistic imagery a little more in detail.

(1) *Disease*.—The malady with which he was afflicted is depicted in the most gruesome colours: and probably some of the details are best understood in a symbolical sense. But as physical suffering is constantly regarded as a mark of the Divine displeasure, there can be no question that a considerable part of the Psalmist's description may be taken quite literally. It was a loathsome, painful, and exhausting disease. The repulsive character of the sickness is sufficiently marked in verse 5. "My wounds stink and are corrupt." They were as foul-smelling as those of the patriarch whose ulcers bred worms (Job vii. 5), and who sat down on the village ash-heap to scrape himself withal (ii. 8). So intense, indeed, was this feeling of repulsion that the language of the Verona MS. would not have come amiss to the afflicted one's lips, when it bids him say

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at the close of verse 20—"They have cast me forth . . . as a loathed corpse."

And yet, deep as this feeling of aversion is, it is entirely eclipsed by the element of intense suffering. He speaks of himself as being "bent" or contorted by the violence of the pain (ver. 6); as consumed by a burning fever which inflamed and licked up the life-blood (ver. 7); until faint and sore-bruised by reason of its severity, he moaned aloud in the disquietude of his heart, or groaned like the roaring of a lion (ver. 8). This is the reading of Hitzig and others, who, by a slight change in the Hebrew vowels, would read "a lion" instead of "my heart." Hence as the concluding element in the Psalmist's grievous malady, the corruption and the pain together ended in an exhaustion which was simply tragic in its completeness.

"My heart throbbed, my strength faileth me:

As for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me."

This was the first arrow which had hurled itself down on the afflicted Psalmist. The

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iron of bodily disease had been driven into the quick.

### (2) *Desertion* (ver. 11).

“My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my plague ;  
And my kinsmen stand afar off.”

Instead of the expression “my plague” which recalls the ashen spot of the leper (Lev. xiii. 3), the Septuagint reads “they draw near”—a figure which no less forcibly reminds us of the drawing near of Job’s three friends. They drew near the suffering patriarch, wrestling as he was with his dark problem ; but biased, as they were, by their preconceived opinions, they were totally incapable of helping him in his sorrow. They were near in person, but leagues asunder in sentiment ; and therefore their empty harangues, in the way of argument, were but “words of wind” (xvi. 3). It is the same picture of utter desolation which is found at Job xix. 13-22. The members of his own family, the children on the highway, and his own familiar friends in whom he trusted—all despised the sorrow-stricken

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patriarch, because, as they believed, he had been deserted by Jehovah. This was the keenest pang of all. Men were such sycophants that they only dared to trample on the bruised reed after they had made sure that heaven had first set down the heel. "Why do ye persecute me as God?" This was the second arrow which buried its poisoned barb in the Psalmist's life. Like the patriarch of Uz, he had been set at naught both by kinsman and friend.

### (3) *Hostility* (ver. 12).

"They also that seek after my life lay snares for me;  
And they that seek my hurt speak mischievous  
things,  
And imagine deceits all the day long."

The first two lines form an exact parallelism dealing with hostility in *act* and hostility in *speech*; and then a third member is added, dealing with hostility in *motive*, either as an expansion of the second line in the parallelism, or as the necessary explanation of the whole. It is the former of these

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alternatives which is suggested by the English punctuation, but the Hebrew accents are in favour of the latter. Beneath the outward hostility of violence and calumny is found the inward plotting of deceit. And the antagonism, as thus depicted, is closely allied to mockery (ver. 16)—

“When my foot slippeth they magnify themselves  
against me.”

“When men are in calamity,” says Bacon, “if we do but laugh we offend.” But the Psalmist’s foes had no such scruple. They beheld, as they conceived, the marks of Divine disfavour resting upon his life, and they magnified themselves against him, rejoicing in his calamity (cf. Obad. 12). And all this constituted the third arrow which penetrated and stuck fast in his quivering frame. In act, speech, and inward motive he was assailed by the hostility of his foes.

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## 2. THE POISON IN WHICH THEY WERE DIPPED.

“There is no health in my bones, *because of my sin*  
(ver. 3).

This was the virulent poison in which the arrows had been dipped. They irritated and inflamed the wounds, because they had aroused the sense of sin within the man's own conscience. In other words, the external ills that harassed and embittered his life had constrained him to turn inward, and down at the roots of character and conduct, like a worm at the root of the tree, he found the malignant presence of moral evil which had dwarfed and impoverished the whole. To adapt the words of the paraphrase—

“The sting was sin and conscious guilt,  
'Twas this that arm'd thy dart:  
The sin gave pain its strength and force  
To pierce the sinner's heart.”

From this as centre, the chastened thought of the Psalmist runs out in various directions. In verse 4, he dwells upon the magnitude of

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the evil. It was like a flood which went over his head, or a heavy burden which overwhelmed and crushed his spirit. Other evils, compared with this, were merely passing shadows flitting across the landscape, but this was the great eclipse shutting out the sunshine, and making the day dark with night. Disease, desertion, and mockery were all directed against the Psalmist, but what was disease to iniquity, what is desertion to ungodliness, and what is ridicule or idle scorn to the consciousness that the man himself is not right with God !

“The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity ;  
But a wounded spirit who can bear ?”

These might be the arrows that hurled themselves down upon the man's truest well-being, but this was the poison in which the arrows had been dipped. And it is the poison, and not the arrows, that inflicts the damage ; the sin, and not the calamity, that leaves its sting.

Hence in verses 13, 14, we have still another turn to the Psalmist's thought. He

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resolves to keep silence even in the presence of his detractors—

“But I, as a deaf man, hear not :

And I am as a dumb man, that openeth not his mouth.”

He is resigned and patient, like the ideal Sufferer, as though he did not hear the insults (Isa. liii. 7); or like a dumb man he makes no answer as though he had no power to rebut them. “Let him alone,” said David, when reviled by Shimei, “it may be that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing of me this day. So David and his men went by the way : and Shimei went along on the hillside over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust” (2 Sam. xvi. 12). *The Lord hath bidden him*—that was enough. The fugitive king bowed his head to the arrows that rained upon him. As a dumb man he opened not his mouth.

### 3. THE HAND THAT SHOT THEM.

“There is no soundness in my flesh, *because of Thine indignation*” (ver. 3).

Not only does he look within to find the



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fever of moral evil inflaming and consuming the life-blood : but he also looks above to find in the fact of the Divine displeasure the ever-efficient cause of his calamity. He traces his hapless condition to the direct agency of Jehovah. And because he does, he discovers another reason for conducting himself with humility before his foes. He could afford to be silent towards men, for Jehovah, the God of Israel, would not be silent towards him.

“In Thee, O Lord, do I hope ;  
Thou wilt answer, O Lord my God ” (ver. 15).

Not that this well of comfort was suggested by the punitive side of the Divine discipline. The indignation depicted in the earlier verses could only wring from him the prayer, that mercy, and not judgment, might be allowed to triumph at last. But there was this other side to the Divine leading or discipline. It was chastisement, the proof of love. Gradually the Psalmist has arisen to this higher conception, and appealing from the Wrath to the Love—from the Hand that

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smites to the Heart that bleeds even when it punishes, he is able to say like our own Crashaw—

“But Thou giv’st leave (dread Lord) that we  
Take shelter from Thyself in Thee:  
And with the wings of Thine own dove  
Fly to Thy sceptre of soft love.”

It is this higher conception that leads the way to a deep and genuine *repentance*. The depth is determined by the height. Because he has soared high, and gazed even for an instant on the ineffable vision, he is also constrained to dig deep and grapple with the awful turpitude of moral evil. He is plunged into the profound depths of self-abasement. Consequently there is some ground for the contention that verse 18 ought to be inserted after verse 15, that after the assurance so confidently expressed in the latter, the resolution to acknowledge his iniquity is at once theologically tenable and psychologically sound.

“In Thee, O Lord, do I hope :

· · · · ·  
(Therefore) I will be sorry for my sin.”

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But may not the converse be equally true, that the height is determined by the depth? that because the man has dug deep and laid bare the inner recesses of moral evil, he is able, in turn, to soar high and rest in the assurance of God's readiness to forgive and in His willingness to hear his cry? If one man looks in faith on the One whom he has pierced and then mourns, may it not be said of another that he repents of his sins and believes? Faith and repentance have no necessary priority in time. They are rather twin-graces of the soul's experience, born together, reared together, brought to maturity and perfection side by side—the one as it develops throwing light upon and intensifying the other, until, through the agency of both, the soul is stablished and strengthened, mellowed and sweetened in the grace and peace of heaven. And thus the psalm which began with the thought of the Divine anger has vindicated its Divine origin; and the Psalmist is able to conclude with an earnest appeal to Jehovah who was the God of his

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salvation (ver. 22). It was His hand that shot the arrows, and it was His hand alone that could heal the wounds; or as it is so beautifully expressed by Newman—

“Look not to me—no grace is mine;  
But I can lift the mercy-sign,  
This wouldst thou? Let it be!  
Kneel down, and take the word divine  
*Absolve Te.*”

*Fides supplex* is not yet transformed into *fides triumphans*, but it can draw near in the hope that maketh not ashamed, and say—

“Make haste to help me,  
O Lord, my salvation.”

PSALM LI.



## AN IDEAL PRAYER.

To discuss the authorship of this psalm may well seem to most readers a needless waste of ingenuity. For while it may have arisen in the personal experiences of King David, as the traditional title expressly affirms, the most ardent advocate of the Davidic authorship is not precluded from assuming that the whole psalm, at least in its present form, could not have originated at that early period. A later exilic age is too clearly reflected in verses 17, 18. But if a subsequent generation added to the poem at all, why should the additional matter be restricted to these two verses? May not the Church of a later era have worked over the whole composition, and in the light of new aspirations and problems have made it

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an ideal prayer both for the individual and for the Church? One fact is plain, that now in its completed form both the individual and the Church find in its classic phrases an ideal expression of their own penitence and worship; and if these two objects are served by the very finish of the composition, it is no meaningless conjecture to suppose that both the individual and the Church have had a real share in its production. There is no note in the whole gamut of its devotion which a modern congregation might not use in the offering of public worship; and no one who knows anything of the spiritual longings of the individual heart will feel any misgiving in utilising every tone or chord that vibrates in this timeless threnody. Many of us, indeed, will hasten to confess that instead of misgiving, we have frequently found in these plaintive but soul-subduing strains the one vehicle possible for our own penitence and devotion. In all ages the saints of God have come to this Hebrew psalm, and found in it a



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helpful, if not a peerless, liturgy : and as such we may profitably summarise its teaching under the following threefold division :—

### I. A PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS.

“According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies,  
blot out my *transgressions*.”

In its rendering for “transgressions,” the Septuagint emphasises the fact that before the Psalmist peers into the depths of a vitiated nature, he gazes at the noxious and fungoid growths which had appeared above the surface and manifested themselves in the life. He commences with the *particular acts* of sin, with which he had at once wronged his fellows and defied his God. Crimes of adultery and bloodguiltiness, as in the life of the Hebrew monarch, or sins of robbery and oppression, Sabbath profanation and irreverence, which had marked the course of a disobedient people, were of such a nature that they could easily be differentiated, and even as single actions were only to be repudiated and condemned.

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Hence in these opening verses all the terms are employed by which moral evil had already been stigmatised in Ps. xxxii. It was rebellion, perversity, and a missing of the mark, all in one. It defied God, allowed itself to drift into crooked courses, and like a caravan lost in the desert, never reached its destined goal.

And what was the explanation of these infatuated actions? If they rose like hills dominating the landscape, and casting a baleful shadow over the life, what was the deep under-bed of rock out of which they rose, and upon which they were so firmly and immovably based? The Psalmist found it in the inner depths of *a vitiated nature*.

“Behold I was shapen in iniquity  
And in sin did my mother conceive me.”

The deepest fact to him was not *sins*, but *sin*. He had been born into a corrupt race. The individual acts were the outcome of a polluted source. They had been moulded by the law of heredity.

It need scarcely be added that there was no thought in this of defaming a mother's

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honour, or of shifting the blame of a man's own actions to the law or will of the Eternal. Human souls which have never felt the weight of conscious guilt may play with these ignoble suggestions, but no one who has felt the sting of an awakened conscience will introduce the thought of heredity for any such purpose. Like the Psalmist he would rather learn the secret of his own infatuation, and realise as he gazes into these profound depths how absolutely helpless a human being is when left to his own efforts and resources. Instead of rising into the light of the Divine favour, he can only sink and disappear in the black maelstrom of iniquity.

It is just at this point, however, that the hope of the true penitent vindicates its Divine origin. He is not thus left alone in his helplessness. He can fall back on the promise of covenant love, and say—

“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness :

According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.”

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He remembers the revealed will and character of Jehovah. He recalls the assured fact that He is a God full of compassion and gracious, abundant in lovingkindness and truth: and realising that this is the fountain-head of all blessing, he can come in the assurance of faith, and pray, that the dreaded record of his sin may be smeared out of God's book, or the loathed leprosy itself expunged out of his heart.

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean :  
Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.”

Let Jehovah Himself take the bunch of hyssop and perform the priestly function. Let Him sprinkle clean water upon the spiritual leper and pronounce him clean. Nay, let it be done *thoroughly*—

“Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin” (ver. 2).

In other words, whatever discipline be required to remove the foul stains, let the painful process be resorted to, that the end in view may be graciously attained, and the man himself stand in the presence of Jehovah,

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a restored and guileless soul. This is the first part of the Psalmist's ideal prayer. Let Jehovah touch the leper and say, "I will, be thou clean." In this large and deeply spiritual sense, let Him bestow His forgiveness.

### 2. A PRAYER FOR HOLINESS.

The second stage in the Psalmist's thought is set forth in verses 10-12. He prays for a human spirit which is at once *renewed*, *sanctified*, and *free*. And he has been led to this wider conception because in his preceding prayer for forgiveness he had already grasped the idea of a vitiated nature. The whole man had been infected with the poison, and now the whole man must share in the remedy. In mind and will and conscience, the spiritual leper must be cleansed. Nay, the thought of cleansing is no longer sufficient. The cleansing of the leper may have been a suitable enough figure for depicting forgiveness: but when the Psalmist comes to this deeper conception of

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inward holiness, he instinctively falls back on the thought of a Divine *creation* or *renewal*—

“Create in me a clean heart, O God;  
And renew a right spirit within me.”

This is at the basis of all true holy living : the vitiated nature must be replaced by a new creation (cf. Ezek. xxxvi. 26).

And the new creation must be *sanctified*. The pure in heart may abide in the presence of the Holy One of Israel, but no one else will or can. The first fratricide could only quail at the thought that he was to be driven forth that day from the presence of Jehovah (Gen. iv. 14) ; while each succeeding generation can only echo the admission—

“ Evil shall not sojourn with Thee :  
The arrogant shall not stand in Thy sight.”

But how shall any one become pure, except through the creative, life-giving power of God ? And how shall any one remain pure, save through the continued operation of the same Divine influence ? The presence and power of Jehovah's spirit is the secret of

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both. Hence, as in the fuller teaching of Ezek. xxxvi. 27, the Psalmist prays—

“Cast me not away from Thy presence  
And take not Thy holy spirit from me.”

In other words, let my own spirit be made new by Divine power. Let it be fashioned into a fit temple for the deity. Then when the inner shrine is thus made meet for its heavenly guest, let Thy Spirit take up its abode in the heart. A life of holiness will at last be assured when the Spirit of Jehovah is my inspirer and guide.

And deepest touch of all, let my renewed spirit be *free*; for this, in any adequate interpretation of the term, is of the very essence of holiness.

“Uphold me with a *free* spirit.”

In the language of David Elginbrod, I would no longer be a “kind of noble slave,” but a free and happy child. I would obey the innate prompting of a new nature, and not simply the compulsion of an external law. For when, in Henry Scougal’s phrase,

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“the life of God is in the soul of man,” there is felt the uprising of a new instinct which spontaneously cares for the things of God, as the heart panteth for the water-brooks. The supernatural has become natural. Just as one man may have a genius for acquiring knowledge, and another a bent or aptitude for practical affairs, Henry Scougal had “a genius for godliness,” a natural instinct for sacrificing himself for the good of others. Like Timothy (Phil. ii. 20) he naturally cared for these things. He did it spontaneously and freely. If one had peered into the depths of his inmost life, he would have found there an instinct which turned to Christ, like the swallow returning to the same old nest. Or to use Dr. Chalmers’ classic phrase, he would have found “the expulsive power of a new affection.” And this, we repeat, is of the very essence of the Psalmist’s ideal prayer. He prays for the spontaneity and freeness of a new nature. The first prayer for forgiveness was not sufficient. It had to be supplemented by the Diviner glow and



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richer life of holiness. And therefore he prays—

“Restore unto me the *joy* of Thy salvation :  
And uphold me with a *free* spirit.”

In this broad and deeply spiritual sense, give me a new life which is renewed, sanctified, and free. Let forgiveness be followed by holiness.

### 3. A PRAYER FOR SERVICE.

“Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation :

. . . . .  
Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways,  
And sinners shall be converted unto Thee.”

Building on his own experience, the Psalmist would both *teach* and *sing*. He would teach others the “ways” or method of the Divine government, according to which, anything like impenitence is visited by condign punishment, but penitence or heartfelt contrition is welcomed and crowned by the fulness of Divine forgiveness. And in the present instance he is assured that his teaching would not be in vain. Those

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who had sinned would be so encouraged by the Psalmist's example, that they would return unto Jehovah and find in the wealth of His covenant love the pledge of all human blessedness. For Jehovah Himself is the vindicator of the covenant. His readiness to forgive is no mere clemency on the part of one who is too indulgent to punish evil. It is part of His eternal *righteousness* (ver. 14). "If we confess our sins, he is merciful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The Psalmist's example may be much, but Jehovah's faithfulness to the covenant is more. The exercise of grace, goodness, and forgiveness is but one part of His Divine rectitude. And therefore the Psalmist adds—

"Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O Lord,  
And my tongue shall *sing aloud* of Thy *righteousness*."

Or again, in his heart of hearts, the true penitent would *worship*. After both the teaching and the singing have lapsed into silence, he would go in before his Maker,

## An Ideal Prayer

and try to render unto Jehovah the homage that was His due. And what is the nature of that service? Even Kipling in his "Recessional" has tried to reproduce the answer—

"The tumult and the shouting dies—  
The Captains and the Kings depart—  
*Still stands Thine ancient Sacrifice,*  
*An humble and a contrite heart.*  
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget—lest we forget!"

The answer is that brightest jewel in Old Testament piety—the unique, spiritual grace of "humility." When instructing his fellow-men, the Psalmist could both teach and sing. He could give expression to the full assurance of his faith in a song of implicit trust. But now, when the song is hushed, and he has turned round to bow before the Eternal, he has but one profound conviction lying upon his spirit—

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit :  
A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt  
not despise."

What are animal sacrifices compared with

## The Lenten Psalms

an offering like that? They are not worthy of being mentioned in the same breath. Bereft of this true spirituality which gives meaning and value to the whole, they are nothing better than the mere externals of worship without the inner vitality or soul. And yet, if Jerusalem were only restored and purified, as the spiritual Church of God should be, there might be a legitimate enough place for animal sacrifices after all. And, therefore, in that sublime liturgical addition which now gives finish to the psalm, the true worshipper prays—

“Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion :

Build Thou the walls of Jerusalem.

Then shalt Thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness . . .

Then shall they offer bullocks upon Thine altar.”

In the meanwhile, the Lord demands obedience and not sacrifice, devotion and not ritual, humility and true contrition rather than the formal presentation of a merely external worship. For only then shall the Psalmist's ideal prayer be gloriously

## An Ideal Prayer

realised ; and penitence, holiness, and service  
be rapt in the profound mysticism of love.

“Thought was not : in enjoyment it expired :  
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request :  
Rapt into still communion that transcends  
The imperfect offices of prayer or praise,  
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power  
That made him : it was blessedness and love.”

This is prayer in its ideality—the rapture  
and adoration of a child.



**PSALM CII.**





## THE DIVINE MEMORIAL.

No finer tribute could be paid to a good man's devotion than the reassuring message addressed to Cornelius, the Roman centurion, that his spiritual attitude in prayer, and its practical result in almsgiving, had come up before Jehovah as a sweet-smelling savour, and been accepted at the Divine footstool as the devout soldier's "memorial" (Acts x. 4). Nevertheless, the thought of the present psalm is deeper. The Psalmist is thinking, not so much of the outstanding characteristics of a man, as of the revealed will and character of Jehovah, Israel's God. He has His "memorial," not less than the most devoted of His worshippers ; and both in motive and actual realisation, that memorial is charged with the deepest interest and instruction for all. Hence while using the

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phraseology of Lam. v. 19, the Psalmist introduces a change which is a sufficient indication of his standpoint. Instead of the term "throne," he substitutes "memorial" in verse 12, and exclaims—

"But Thou, Jehovah, sittest enthroned for ever,  
And Thy *memorial* unto all generations."

The verse, as thus adapted, may be carried as a lamp throughout the entire psalm, until each thought and phrase is illumined by the brilliance of its light.

### I. THE DISCIPLINE OF THE INDIVIDUAL.

This is the prevailing note in verses 1-11, though some of the expressions may be equally well referred to the discipline of the exilic Church: especially the appalling figure in verse 10—

"Thou hast taken me up, and cast me away"—

*i.e.* caught me up as in a whirlwind and swept me away into this far-off land of exile, where I lie broken by the storm, a byword among the heathen! The

## The Divine Memorial

metaphor, as thus explained, may be illustrated by Job xxx. 22, though in the latter passage the description of utter desolation is carried a step further—

“Thou liftest me up to the wind . . .  
And *dissolvest me* in the roar of the storm.”

No figure, indeed, could be too overwhelming to portray the hapless condition of Israel in that far-off land. She had verily been whirled away in the hurricane of God's righteous anger, and there, by the waters of Babylon, she had become the derision and execration of the stranger. So we read in verse 8—

“Mine enemies reproach me all the day long,  
They that are mad against me do curse by me.”

And yet in these introductory verses there is a deeper truth than the thought of Israel as a church. There is the individualising of the national woes. There is the gathering of the Church's perplexities into the consciousness of the individual heart. For even in exile the Church was

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made up of individual Israelites ; and it is only as the individual member, in any age, identifies himself with the Church, and is willing to espouse her cause and to bear her burdens, that the set time for remembering Zion can in any sense be accelerated or the promise of a new era be fulfilled. Hence, in the plaintive strains of these opening verses, it is the personal, rather than the national, consciousness that is struggling for expression. The Psalmist, as an individual Israelite, has made the Church's perplexities his own.

“I keep vigil : and am become  
Like a solitary bird upon the housetop.”

Indeed, the sense of his solitude and suffering is so profound, that he practically exhausts his store of imagery in trying to depict his lonely and hapless condition. Not only had he been cast into a fiery furnace (ver. 3) whose scorching flame had licked up his vital energy, reducing him to exhaustion and emaciation (4, 5) ; but he was left alone like solitude-loving birds

## The Divine Memorial

which inhabit dark and desolate ruins (6, 7), where his only sustenance was ashes and tears (ver. 9), and where his days were running their swift course like the *lengthening* shadow on the sundial, while he himself could only be compared to the parched and withered grass (ver. 11).

It was a dark picture : and yet the deepest touch has still to be added. It was because of Jehovah's indignation and wrath (ver. 10). The bitterest drop in his cup was neither the sadness nor the solitude : it was the fact that he was conscious of being under the righteous displeasure of the Lord. This was a darkness that might be felt. Well might he liken himself to the night-owl, uttering weird and mournful cries among the ruins, or to the solitary, nocturnal bird that sits upon the housetop awake, while every one in the house below is asleep ; for he, alas, was also surrounded by ruins—the ruins of his shattered hopes—and as far as he could pierce the darkness of the night, there was only the blackness of despair settling irrevocably upon his

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spirit. The lengthening shadow on the dial was only too prophetic of the end. His sun ere long would dip beneath the horizon, and he would be left alone with the stars.

Be it so. Even if the stars could only remind him of Jehovah's sleepless indignation, he might nevertheless find in that awe-inspiring conception the surprising promise of a better dawn. Jehovah's indignation was simply another form of Jehovah's faithfulness, and faithfulness in turn is only another name for covenant love. Only let the distressed soul gaze long enough at the stars that were thus guarding his sleepless nights; and he might yet learn the lesson which Jeremiah learned in the Parable of the Almond Branch (chap. i. 11-12)—the lesson of Jehovah's unceasing watchfulness. The prophet might only gaze for a moment on the beautiful flowers of the almond tree; but when was there an instant in the history of Israel that the God of their fathers was not watching over His word to perform it?

# The Divine Memorial

The Divine Watcher of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. And even if the performance of that word meant, and could only mean, the punishment of all ungodliness, what then?

“Did I meet no trials here,  
No chastising by the way,  
Might I not with reason fear  
I should be a castaway?

Others may escape the rod,  
Sunk in earthly vain delight;  
But the true-born child of God,  
Must not, would not, if he might.”

In fine, the very depth of the Psalmist's trial was a part of the Lord's memorial. It was chastisement, the proof of His love.

## 2. THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH.

“Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion :  
For the time to favour her, yea, the set time is come.”

This also was a part of the Divine memorial ; and it was well for the Psalmist that he had identified himself with the Church's perplexities, for in so doing he was now

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to discover that he had taken the one step necessary for entering into the fulness of the Church's reward. The anguish of despair was now to be supplanted by the rapture of a Divine expectancy. In other words, the cause of a stricken Zion is never espoused in vain. She always gives more than she gets.

With the thought of chastisement, for instance, the sufferer has been led to raise his eyes to heaven, and immediately everything is altered. The wail of penitence is changed into a song of rapturous praise. For enthroned on the skyline of the everlasting hills, he beholds a vision, peerless and soul-subduing in its sublimity, concerning which he might have said, in the language of E. B. Browning—

“There sittest Thou, the satisfying One,  
With blood for sins, and holy perfectings  
For all requirements—while the archangel, raising  
Toward Thy face his full ecstatic gazing,  
Forgets the rush and rapture of his wings!”

He beholds Jehovah, the Ruler of heaven and earth and the Disposer of human destiny,



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and realises in the light of that Divine unveiling, not simply that all is well with the world, but in a special sense that all must be well with the Church. For with a flash of spiritual insight he is able to read the two things together—Jehovah's sovereignty over all, and that which was the basal fact in Israel's history, the covenant relationship inaugurated at Sinai and solemnly ratified by blood. This is the reason why the thought of a "throne" instinctively passed over into the conception of a "memorial," and that the language of verse 12 was deliberately coined to express the illuminating change. The Psalmist was listening to the never-to-be-forgotten teaching of Ex. iii. 15, "This is my name for ever, and this is my *memorial* unto all generations . . . Jehovah, the God of your fathers, hath sent me unto you."

Everything was possible in the light of that Divine truth. It was even possible that God's set time to remember Zion had at last arrived. God's faithfulness to the covenant was an essential element in that hope. He

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was not unmindful of His covenant promise ; and, therefore, the Hebrew captives could say—

“Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion :  
 . . . Yea, the set time is come.”

The main proof that Jehovah was about to comfort Jerusalem was lying nearer the hearts of the weeping captives than they deemed. The Psalmist found it in the yearning love of the captives themselves. Even by the waters of Babylon they were thinking of Zion. They had affection for her ruins, and were moved with pity for her dust. And it cannot be emphasised too strongly that when good men thus begin to lay to heart the weight of the Church's calamity, this is the unfailing spiritual token that Jehovah himself has already begun to work. The stirring of love and pity in the hearts of the exiles is a real presage of the dawn, “like the keen morning air stirring the sleeping flowers before sunrise.” Yes, even in exile, the captives were feeling the thrill of the homing instinct ; and, therefore, they

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could say, like Dr. Matheson in reference to his own blindness, that while he was “overtaken by the night, he was yet *confident of the morning.*”

“The wind grew cold, a change was in the sky,  
And in deep silence did the dawn draw nigh.”

And the new era, as thus anticipated, was full of promise for the Hebrew captives. By the use of perfect tenses they transport themselves into the future, and paint the story of their restoration as a fully realised fact.

“The Lord hath built up Zion,  
He hath appeared in His glory,  
He hath regarded the prayer of the destitute,  
And hath not despised their prayer.”

If the Israelites in Babylon were like condemned captives, languishing in prison, and doomed to perish in that exile land, unless Jehovah should speedily interpose in their favour ; they nevertheless beheld with the eye of faith that the interposition had been effected, that Jehovah had intervened in their behalf, and that now from the vantage-ground of their

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own restoration the eagle-like wings of their faith must be ready for a wider and vaster flight. The ingathering of Israel was but the prelude to the ingathering of the nations. All nations were to come and bless themselves in Abraham's seed. This, indeed, was the ultimate design of what they had learned to call the Lord's memorial; and, therefore, as the final stage in the working out of this fundamental conception, we have—

### 3. THE PERFECTING OF THE WORLD.

“*Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*”—who has not read the well-known epitaph over the inner north doorway of St. Paul's? No other monument is needed. No other relic would suffice. The completed structure, in all its massive splendour, is the only worthy memorial of Sir Christopher Wren. And the teaching of the present psalm is somewhat similar. It would say, with our own Tennyson :—

“One God, one law, one element,  
And one far-off Divine event,  
To which the whole creation moves.”

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And when that august goal has been reached, and all "the peoples are gathered together to serve the Lord" (ver. 22), well may a celestial voice be heard, saying, "If you wish to see His *memorial*, look around." For when at the close of the world's great drama, the morning stars sing together, as at the beginning, and all the sons of God shout for joy, a glorified humanity will lift up its eyes on the finished structure, and confess that in all its massive grandeur no other monument is required, that this is His memorial to all generations—Jehovah, the God of Israel, hath done all things well.

But how is that august goal to be reached? Is it by frail human effort, by the laws and processes of external nature, or by the intervention and might of Jehovah? The concluding verses of this psalm give no uncertain answer. It is not by the exercise of frail human effort. Thrust back once more into the misery of his present, the Psalmist can only complain, as in verse 23—

"My strength hath He weakened in the way ;  
And my days hath He shortened."

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Frail man ! What is his life but the lengthening shadow on the sundial ? Or the heavens and the earth ! What measure of abiding trust can Israel repose upon them ? Alas, they, too, shall perish and come to an end, as if smitten by the same fatal blight of mortality.

“ Yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment ;

As a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed.”

But in contrast with both, read verse 27. Turning away from man and nature alike, the Psalmist catches hold of God's skirts and prays—

“ But Thou art He ; and Thy years shall have no end.”

He falls back on the personality and immortality of Israel's God, and feels that in these he has the promise and pledge of his own. From of old, O Jehovah, Thou didst say as Thine age-long memorial, “ I will be that I will be ”: and that is the undecaying hope of Thy people still. They can take refuge in the ever-widening sweep of Thy

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Divine purposes, and sum up all their confidence, as they now conclude this psalm, saying—

“The children of Thy servants shall continue,  
And their seed shall be established before Thee.”

This is sinking the individual not simply in the fortunes of the Church, but in the greatness and glory of the Church's Head : and as Jesus taught his disciples long after, this is the one approved method for finding and enjoying all. For when the individual, the Church, and the nations lift up their eyes amid the glories of the completed structure it will be to confess that the sovereignty and faithfulness of Israel's God have been, at last, supremely vindicated ; and that now in the rapture of an abiding trust, each child of the kingdom may say—

“But Thou, Jehovah, sittest enthroned for ever ;  
And Thy memorial unto all generations.”





PSALM CXXX.



## *DE PROFUNDIS.*

THIS great ode has won the admiration and moved the hearts of devout men in all ages. In his dying moments, as cited by Prothero, the thoughts of Richard Hooker, the pride of English theologians, dwelt on this psalm ; while Luther, in his efforts to give the German nation a Bible and Hymn-Book, founded upon it his well-known hymn—

“Aus tiefer Noth schrei ich zu dir.”

And who can forget the sublime symbolism of Sir Noël Paton’s wonderful creation, “*De Profundis*”—the female figure, the soul, struggling out of the mists of the valley, with her beautiful gauze robe and butterfly wings all frayed and stained by the mire ; and the peerless form of the Saviour coming

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round the crest of the hill, laying aside His crook, and with tender gaze, yet tense hands, snatching the well-nigh exhausted Psyche from the abyss. What an incomparable blending of the human and Divine—human faith and Divine faithfulness meeting and co-operating in one supreme act of covenant love ! And yet how limp the arms of the human figure are, when compared with the strong, tense grasp of the Good Shepherd ! It is not so much faith that saves : it is the Saviour ; and, therefore, the teaching of the whole canvas can only re-echo the closing strain of the Psalmist—

“O Israel, hope in the Lord ;  
For with the Lord there is mercy.  
And He shall redeem Israel  
From all his iniquities.”

But what are the depths out of which the Hebrew singer directs his supplications ? The present psalm gives no uncertain answer. It suggests, at least, a threefold division.

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### I. THE GREAT DEEP OF SIN, AND ITS ONE PROFOUND NEED—FORGIVENESS.

This is the burden of verses 3, 4, as read more particularly in the light of the instructive Hebrew names.

“If Thou, *Jah*, shouldest mark iniquities,  
O *Adonai*, who shall stand?  
But there is forgiveness with Thee,  
That Thou mayst be feared.”

It recalls the teaching of Hosea, the prophet of love. Jehovah was to him not only a King or Ruler who demanded civil justice as between man and man, or ethical righteousness as a reflection of the Divine ; He was also a Divine Husband and Father who had taken Israel into covenant relationship with Himself, and who still yearned over the unfaithful wife or over the disobedient son, after she or he had been guilty of spiritual apostasy. Both as Jehovah's spouse and Jehovah's son, Israel was pledged to a life of fidelity and service ; and, therefore, the peculiar character of Israel's backsliding was

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to be read and judged in the light of that fact. It was at least two things in one. It was a sin against covenant love, and a grave dereliction of duty. She had committed two great evils—slighted the love which a father's God had cherished towards her, as "Jah"; and in so doing had failed to render the filial service and obedience which she owed to Him as "Adonai." And in all this there was the proof not only of unrighteous conduct or the breach of universal law, but of a heart not true to Jehovah, out of sympathy with His character and ungrateful to His love.

This is the true nature of sin as depicted in the present psalm. The individual, no less than the nation, had departed from Jehovah. He had sinned against Him as the God of love, and was now trembling at the prospect of having to meet Him as the God of power. But who can stand before Him as Adonai, if He, as the God of the covenant, be strict to mark iniquity? No one. Before the searching glance of Him who is both loving-kindness and power, the

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conscience-smitten Israelite can only sink into the abyss.

What, on the other hand, if the God of Israel should not be extreme to sift? The mere possibility that there might be another alternative is full of promise for every sincere penitent. In the plenitude of His mercy He might allow the inner graciousness of His motive to determine the character of His discipline, and say, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within Me: My compassions are kindled together." Hence the punishment, though richly deserved, would not be the "ban" of an utter extermination: it would be chastisement—the proof of His love. This is the profound conception that calms and reassures the Psalmist now. He might quail at the prospect of facing the sovereign might of Adonai, but what if the covenant love of Jah should act as his Divine *goel*? Might he not appeal from the one to the other—from the power to the love—and

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say, with the author of the "Royal Crown,"  
that he would fly *from God to God?*

"From Thee to Thee I fly to win  
A place of refuge, and within  
Thy shadow from Thy anger hide  
Until Thy wrath be turned aside.

Unto Thy mercy I will cling  
Until Thou hearken pitying ;  
Nor will I quit my hold of Thee  
Until Thy blessing light on me."<sup>1</sup>

This is the Psalmist's perfect plea when  
realising the depth of his own iniquity.  
He can lift his eyes, like Psyche, to the  
Great Shepherd of Israel and say—

"But there is *forgiveness* with Thee,  
That Thou mayst be feared."

The sin of man may be deep, but the  
forgiveness of God is deeper. The con-  
sciousness of guilt may be wiped out by  
the exercise of covenant love.

<sup>1</sup> Solomon Ibn Gebirol, born in Malaga, 1021. See  
Abraham's *Short History of Jewish Literature*, p. 64.



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### 2. THE CLOSELY ALLIED DEEP OF SUFFERING AND ITS ONE PROFOUND NEED OF PATIENCE.

This is the supplementary thought contained in verses 5, 6. When the prophet Nathan exclaimed in the Parable of the One Ewe Lamb, "Thou art the man" (2 Sam. xii. 7), the royal backslider at once confessed his sin, and was as promptly assured of the Divine forgiveness. He might have said, in the language of Ps. xxxii. 5—

"I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the  
Lord :

And Thou—Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

But what of the other great deep of suffering which had come as sin's necessary and bitter fruit? What of the personal and family sorrows which had fallen so calamitously upon his life? Were these also wiped out by the alchemy of faith, or by the free, spontaneous outflow of Divine forgiveness? Alas, for the answer. "Because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord

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to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." The sin might be forgiven, but the sorrow and the suffering remained.

Now, in these circumstances, what is the one supreme need of the suppliant? Not simply the faith that justifies, but the Spirit-taught patience that endures. He must learn to say, as in verses 5, 6—

"I wait for God, my soul doth wait,  
My hope is in His word,  
More than they that for morning watch,  
My soul waits for the Lord."

"Ye have heard of the patience of Job," adds the Apostle, "and have seen the *end* of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity and merciful." What, in view of both of these passages, is the true nature of Christian patience? Is it the mere submission of a soul which has no power to resist—the cold, dull stupor of a man who is compelled to bow to the inevitable? Is it not rather the spiritual attitude of one who is thrilled by a deathless hope—the calm resignation of a human

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spirit, which, having seen the *end* of the Lord, is now confident of the morning? Yes—

“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright:  
For *there is a future* for the man of peace.”

Ps. xxxvii. 37 (margin).

Patient waiting upon God has a future. It is an attitude of soul which is closely akin to hope. It is deeply rooted in the soil of childlike communion with Jehovah, and will yet wave its branches and bear its fruit in the sunshine of covenant love. The secret of the Lord is its strength. Having turned its face towards Adonai—for without any descriptive verb he exclaims, “my soul is *to the Lord*”—he is confident that not more surely shall they who watch for the dawn be rewarded by the glory of the sunrise, than will Adonai, the God of power, appear in His glory, and cause the night of His servant’s sorrow to cease. This sets the reality of the Psalmist’s assurance of forgiveness in the strongest possible light. Once he quailed at the prospect of appearing before Adonai, but

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now the advent of His Divine might is his one inspiration and hope. The same Power which might have crushed him in his state of unforgiven sin is now to appear in his favour and vindicate his confidence. He can therefore trust and not be afraid, even in the dark night of sorrow ; he can stay his chastened spirit upon his God.

And is this not the pressing need of the present generation ? In an age when all the ephemeral playthings of the hour are duly recorded in the morning papers, and the moral energies of the race are in grave danger of being wasted on a multiplicity of trifles ; and when even the Church is being tempted to accept the alluring teaching that all human suffering is an anachronism—that the natural human flight from pain is really a spiritual quality which ought to be raised to the dignity of a moral obligation ; is there not an ever-growing necessity for the trumpet-call of this time-honoured psalm, emphasising, as it does, the need of a renewed deepening of thought at the centre, a firmer grasp of the value of Divine

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discipline, and a calm, resigned waiting upon the Lord? The grace of God is sufficient for all the children of sorrow, even though the iron which has entered into the quick is not at once removed. By prayer and supplication with thanksgiving the afflicted suppliant is to make known all his requests unto God, and even if the prayer is not answered, at least in the way so fondly anticipated, the *peace* of God which passeth all understanding shall guard his heart and his thoughts in Christ Jesus. This is the second way in which the God of all grace comes to the help of His suffering people. In the great deep of their sorrow and suffering He teaches them the patience that endures.

### 3. THE GREAT DEEP OF HUMILITY AND ITS ONE PROFOUND NEED OF ASSURANCE.

“There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayst be *feared*”; nay, there is discipline with Thee, that Thou mayst be revered and adored. The two combined give us the brightest jewel in Old Testament

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piety. The fear and the adoration together give us humility. "To this man will I look, saith the Lord, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My word."

But what, in essence, is this peculiarly Christian grace? "It is no mere modesty or absence of pretension—a meaning which even heathen writers might have read into it!—no, nor even a self-made grace in any sense; it is an esteeming of ourselves small, *inasmuch as we are so*" (Trench). Inasmuch as we are so! That may not be the impression made upon us by the imperfect examples of our fellows, but it is the conviction produced by the felt presence of Jehovah's power. Like Charles Lamb, we might possibly be able to stand erect before the greatest of our human masters, but if *He* should come in, we would all *kneel*. This, we repeat, is the brightest gem in Old Testament piety. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.

Now, here, again, what is the humble man's supreme need, especially when he comes to

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deal with friend or fellow? Not to allow his humble-mindedness to paralyse his confidence so that he becomes dumb with timidity before the Church or the world ; but, to allow the fear of God to so possess his mind and spirit, that, having eliminated every other fear, he can say—

“ O Israel, hope in the Lord ;  
For with the Lord there is mercy,  
And with Him is plenteous redemption.”

The humble man's need is an assurance of salvation so deep and strong that he will be constrained to become an evangelist. And it is not without interest in this connection to recall that it was the singing of this psalm as an anthem, at St. Paul's Cathedral, on 24th May 1738, which stirred the heart of John Wesley to receive that quickening sense of God's redeeming love which made him one of the foremost ministers and evangelists of his time. The Psalmist's theme, indeed, might well make the most timid man eloquent. Like the Divine Spirit, whose word it is, it is a message whose illuminating power searches

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all things, yea, the deep things of God. It searches and illumines the deep things of His *love* ; for “with the Lord there is mercy” —not only inherent in His nature, but with Him, as His “darling attribute” (Matthew Henry), the very essence and seal of His covenant. And the deep things of His *truth*, for the Psalmist had already said, “in His word do I hope”—that word of promise and age-long wisdom which, like Jehovah Himself, is eternal. And chief of all, the deep things of His *redemption* : “plenteous redemption” is the arresting phrase, containing enough for all, enough for each, enough for me. “Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy.”

These are the deep things of God—His character, His truth, His salvation ; and yet the proper theme of the psalm has been the deep things of a man—his sin, his suffering, his humility. Out of the depths of the one he has cried in an agony of



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appeal to the fulness and might of the other, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I"; and like "deep calling unto deep," the love of Jah has responded to the impassioned appeal, and with all the might of Adonai has snatched the well-nigh exhausted Psyche from the abyss. And what He has done for one, He will do for all.

"He shall redeem Israel  
From all his iniquities."

In each generation, then, let every rescued soul sing—

"Plenteous redemption  
Is ever found with Him,  
And from all his iniquities  
He Israel shall redeem."



PSALM CXLIIL



## A PENITENT'S ANTHOLOGY.

THE present psalm may be rightly described as an afflicted man's anthology. It is a compilation of imagery and spiritual teaching derived from the time-honoured records of the past. No one can read Ps. vii. 5 or Lam. iii. 6 without recognising the sources of verse 3—

“The enemy hath persecuted my soul ;  
He hath smitten it down to the ground :  
He hath made me to dwell in dark places, as those  
that have been long dead.”

Or, in contrast with his present dejection, was the Psalmist desirous of recalling the brighter memories of his past? He had only to turn to Ps. lxxvii. 5, 6, 11, 12 and read, as in verse 5—

“I remember the days of old :  
I meditate on all Thy doings :  
I muse on the work of Thy hands.”

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Or, finally, does he cast an anxious glance into the future, and fondly cherish the hope that in the coming years Jehovah would guide his steps in the path of righteousness? He culls passages like Ps. xxvii. 11, Isa. xxvi. 7, Neh. ix. 20, and exclaims, as in verse 10—  
“Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God:  
Thy Spirit is good: lead me in the land of uprightness.”

This reverence for the past, however, is but one aspect of the afflicted man's devotion. It is always illuminated and enhanced by a homage which is Divine. If the book of Israel's history and psalmody is lying open upon his knee, he is reading it in the presence of Jehovah, and allowing the light of the eternal world to fall upon its pages. In a word, he is breathing the atmosphere of prayer, and supplicating the help of the God of Israel to assist him in his study of Divine truth. Hence, the moment he lifts the pen to begin his anthology, it is to write—

“Hear my prayer, O Lord: give ear to my supplications:  
In Thy faithfulness answer me, and in Thy righteousness.”

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The entire psalm falls into two equal sections by the insertion of the musical term "Selah" at the close of verse 6. In the former part we have a pathetic description of the afflicted man's present, while in the latter he furnishes an equally instructive picture of the greatness of his future hope : and as these are the two broad divisions in the logical evolution of the thought, we may profitably assign a few brief paragraphs to each.

### I. THE HAPLESSNESS OF HIS PRESENT.

It begins with a plaintive allusion to the bitter hostility of his foes (ver. 3). Like some distressed son of Jesse, hunted as a partridge upon the mountains, the Psalmist has been driven into dark and desolate places, where, smitten to the ground by ruthless persecution, he lies crushed and forgotten, "as those that have been long dead." It recalls the Erechite's lament over the desolation of his fatherland—

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“The mighty enemy has smitten me down like a single reed.

I mourn day and night like the marshland.”<sup>1</sup>

The boom of the bittern and the multiplied cry of the raven were the only sounds that answered the bitterness of his wail. Hence he continues, as in verse 4—

“My spirit fainteth within me :  
My heart within me is appalled.”

And this all the more when he reflected that the chastisement as thus inflicted was by no means undeserved. An awakened conscience was only too ready to drive home the sense of personal guilt. No doubt a son's rebellion, like that of Absalom, or the execration of one like Shimei, was a bitter enough experience in the life of the Hebrew monarch ; but what was rebellion to personal ungodliness, and what was execration or biting scorn to the consciousness that the man himself was not right with God ? This was an aspect of the persecution that drove the iron into the quick ;

<sup>1</sup> *Records of the Past*, new series, vol. i. p. 85.



## A Penitent's Anthology

and, therefore, the Psalmist can only pray, as in verse 2—

“Enter not into judgment with Thy servant :  
For in Thy sight shall no man living be justified.”

Consequently, in verses 5, 6, he gropes around to find, if possible, a way of escape from the dark prison-house of his fear. He turns, for instance, to the brighter memories of the past. With the torch of memory he hies back to the contemplation of God's mighty acts in history, that he may find in the record of former days a possible mitigation of his sorrow.

“I remember the days of old :  
I muse on the work of Thy hands.”

It is not necessarily the case that “a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.” It may rather be the pledge of a fresh infusion of hope. If only the “happier things” were instinct with God—alive with the presence and power of Jehovah, the God of Israel—the recalling of the events, instead of crowning sorrow with a keener sense of loss, will only discrown it

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by the implanting of a firmer trust. And that this has been the case with the present suppliant is plain from the strong appeal depicted in verse 6. The God who had wrought so wondrously in the past was the sure refuge and stay of His people still; and, therefore, lifting his eyes to heaven, the penitent exclaims—

“I spread forth my hands unto Thee;  
My soul thirsteth after Thee, as a weary land.”

Omar Khayyám had no such message, as given in stanzas 72, 76 of his great poem—

“We are no other than a moving row  
Of magic shadow shapes that come and go,  
Round with this Sun-illuminated Lantern held  
In midnight by the Master of the Show.

And that inverted bowl they call the sky  
Whereunder crawling coop'd we live and die!  
*Lift not your hands to it for help*—for it  
As impotently rolls as you or I.”

True, but it is not an *it* to which the persecuted Psalmist is now directing his supplication. It is to the God of the covenant—that most spiritual and most living of all personal powers, Jehovah, the

## A Penitent's Anthology

God of Israel. Directing his prayer to Him, the penitent is persuaded that his hands are not stretched forth in vain ; for in all the great crises of the past Jehovah had come in the fulness of His covenant love, and delivered His oppressed people from their fears, and He would not allow their enemies to triumph now by leaving His afflicted servant in their hands. He would come in the plenitude of His sovereign mercy, and save the fainting soul that was turned to Him in trust. For not more truly did the weary land long for the refreshing and life-giving rain than did the soul of the Psalmist pant for a renewal of God's former blessings. And this would be the unfailing expression of his confidence now : his soul, no less than his prayer, would be turned towards Jehovah. He would say with Herbert in his own quaint rhyme—

“Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,  
Though foolishly he lost the same,  
Decaying more and more,  
Till he became  
Most poor :

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With Thee  
Let me combine  
And feel this day Thy victorie ;  
For if I imp my wing on Thine,  
*Affliction shall advance the flight in me."*

This is the gracious conclusion of the first part of the afflicted man's anthology. He spreads out his hapless condition before Jehovah, the God of Israel, and prays for deliverance.

## 2. THE GREATNESS OF HIS FUTURE HOPE.

As if to ratify the conclusion already reached in the first part, he prepares the way for this wider conception by a reiterated prayer for deliverance, saying, as in verse 9—

"Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies :  
I flee unto Thee to hide me."

For until he was delivered, as Israel had been, from the hated yoke of the oppressor, what hope was there that he would be continued in the land of the living at all? His spirit would fail utterly, and he himself would become like "those that go down into

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the pit." Hence he prays, as in verse 8, but reading the verb "to satisfy," as in Ps. xc. 14.

"O satisfy me in the morning with Thy mercy;  
For in Thee do I trust."

Having turned his face towards the dawn, like those who watch for the morning, he looks, and waits, and longs for deliverance, saying with Phinehas Fletcher—

"As a watchman waits for day,  
And looks for light and looks again,  
When the night grows old and gray,  
To be relieved he calls amain:  
So look, so wait, so long my eyes  
To see my Lord, my Sun, arise."

It is on the basis of this hope that he proceeds in verses 8*b*, 10-12, to offer a threefold prayer for a brighter and nobler future. He longs for a walk in fellowship with Jehovah, which would be characterised by knowledge, obedience, and love.

He prays, first, that his walk with Jehovah may be, at least, a thing of *knowledge*.

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“Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk ;  
For I lift up my soul unto Thee.”

It was with these words that Savonarola resolved to renounce the world, and become a monk in the Dominican monastery at Bologna. All through his youth the hard-featured stripling had brooded over the wickedness and misery of the times, until, as he informed his father after the event, with the words of Ps. cxliii. 8 upon his lips, he fled to the sanctuary of the cloister to escape, if possible, the stifling atmosphere by which he had been surrounded outside. But alas, the monastic order itself was by no means immaculate. For seven years he remained at Bologna, spending his time in prayer and penitence, and trying to find comfort and recreation in teaching the novices, but finding every day his heart overwhelmed with grief, and stirred to irrepressible indignation by beholding the debasement and scandalous corruption of the papal Church. Transferred at last to Florence in 1481, and elected Prior of St. Mark's, he felt that a very different

## A Penitent's Anthology

estimate of life and duty must now characterise his later and maturer teaching. As Villari has so well expressed it in his *Life and Times*, it was no longer a question of "forsaking the world, but of living in its midst in order to purify it: it was his business to train men, not to be good hermits, but worthy monks, living an exemplary life, and ready to shed their blood for the salvation of souls." In other language, his prayer for Divine knowledge had led him farther than he deemed. It had led him away from the hermit-like existence of the cloister altogether, to fight a hard battle, and, if need be, to suffer and die, in the broad thoroughfares of the world.

All this, however, was simply to enter into the second element of the Psalmist's prayer, just as it had become the accepted motto of Savonarola himself, that all genuine knowledge of the Divine purpose must be loyally translated into *obedience*. So verse 10—

"Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God:  
Thy spirit is good; lead me in the land of uprightness."

## The Lenten Psalms

The reformer's motto was, *Tanto sa ciasenno quanto opera*—"As much as one knows, so much one does"—and, therefore, he pursued his thankless task of trying to purify public life, and of rekindling faith in the Church, even though all the powers that be were arranged against him. Like Robert Browning, he was

"One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,  
Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong  
would triumph,  
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
Sleep to wake."

And that this lesson is enforced by every page in the history of Israel is evident to every one who reads, as Savonarola did, the Old Testament story. Knowledge of the Divine will is never sufficient: it must be knowledge that is followed by obedience. The language of the pious in Israel must ever be, "Lo, I come, I delight to do Thy will, O my God." Apart from this, even sacrifice was an abomination and worship a



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snare. And, therefore, the magnates of Samaria, not less than Saul, the son of Kish, must listen to the same teaching, that obedience, and not sacrifice, was the pleasure of the Lord ; “doing justly,” and not mere outward observance, was His delight.

But if so, they must be prepared for the third essential element in the Psalmist's prayer, that if knowledge has been followed by obedience, obedience, in turn, must be inspired and beautified by *love*. The “delight” referred to by the pious in Israel can be attained in no other way. Apart from the life-giving breath of covenant love, obedience, however perfect, is but the service of a noble slave : it is not the free and spontaneous service of a happy child. And therefore, in verses 11, 12, the Psalmist prays—

“Quicken me, O Lord, for Thy name's sake ;

For I am Thy servant.”

“Earnest love,” said Savonarola, “is truly a great might, for it can do all things. . . . Nought can be done save by the impulse of

## The Lenten Psalms

love." In other words, the "quickenings" referred to is the energising of the human spirit with the life and love of Jehovah—a Divine inbreathing which transforms work into worship, and obedience into a pure and holy joy. And as this Divine transformation finds its fullest expression in the sphere of mutual affection, the quickening desired is simply the inflaming of human love until it beats in unison with the Divine. "Lo, I come : in the volume of the book it is written of me, I *delight* to do Thy will, O my God."

Knowledge, obedience, love ! It is a high ideal, and little marvel if the Psalmist faltered as he gazed at the heights and reflected on the fulness of his vision—faltered, indeed, so much, that feeling himself thrust back once more into the haplessness of his present, he paused and trembled, lest, through the opposition of his foes, his prayer for Divine fellowship should be thwarted after all. And yet in the plea, "*for Thy name's sake,*" he had taken his stand on a rock that never could be shaken. He had fallen back on the revealed will and character

## A Penitent's Anthology

of Israel's God, and before that "memorial" enemies could do nothing. Righteousness and loving-kindness (vers. 11, 12) were woven together in one perfect plea, just as righteousness and faithfulness (ver. 1) were combined in the Psalmist's opening cry. So that, despite the hostility of his foes, or the hapless condition of his present lot, the penitent might well come in the strength of a perfect trust, and lay his anthology of sorrow upon the altar. He might come with his threefold prayer for knowledge, obedience, and love, and conclude his earnest supplication, as we too would close these readings in the Penitential Psalms, with the words—

“Quicken me, O Lord, for Thy name's sake;  
For I am Thy servant.”



## APPENDIX.

### SOME ADDITIONAL READING.

IN studying the Penitential Psalms with a view to expository preaching, the following easily accessible literature should be carefully consulted. (1) Professor Kirkpatrick's admirable volumes on *The Book of Psalms*, in "The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges." For any part of the Song-Book of Israel, these three volumes, designed for the English reader, are simply invaluable. Then (2) for spiritual insight and felicity of phrase, give us Maclaren in the *Expositor's Bible*. His volume on Colossians may be the best thing he ever did in expounding a New Testament Epistle; but here, also, in many psalms he touches the high-water mark of pulpit exposition. The freshness of thought, no less than the grace of diction, is sometimes superb. If the preacher can add (3) the sanity and solidity of Calvin, and (4) the spiritual savour and quaintness of Matthew Henry (books that might be more read than they are), he will have all that he needs for the quickening

## Appendix

of his own thought or the interest and instruction of his hearers. (5) Historical illustrations of the Psalms in human life are of special value to the Christian expositor, and as *Prothero* is now issued by Nelson & Sons in the "Library of Notable Books," it is brought within the reach of all.

For the Hebrew student, however, the main preparation for expository preaching has yet to be noted. Nothing can take the place of a first-hand acquaintance with the text. Every hour spent over the Hebrew and Greek words will save many hours afterwards in wading through other courses of expository or homiletical reading. It may readily be accepted as an axiom in Biblical exposition, that the study of syntax, synonyms, and figures of speech is the great time-saver in the subsequent preaching of the Word. The present writer can only repeat the conviction expressed at pp. 10-11 of his *Sermons in Accents*, and illustrated in the specimen page for a *Student's Note-Book* at p. 192, that the motto for all those who are beginning the task of expository lecturing is, "Back to the Hebrew text."

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